



‘Have confidence in AFPC,’ O-8 says

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Maj. Gen. A.J. Stewart has gotten a crash course on all things personnel since taking command of Air Force Personnel Center in August.

Stewart sat down Nov. 19 with Air Force Times to discuss what he’s learned, his goals for the command and what airmen can expect from him and his team of 2,600 military, civilian and contract personnel specialists.



Q. What has surprised you these past three months at AFPC and what are your goals?
Everybody knows that AFPC does assignments and that’s usually the context that most people think of AFPC, but we do so much more here.

Having learned a little bit about personnel, as much as I can be an expert in the last 90 days or so, some things do emerge as being very important

I’ll give you one as an example. In the U.S. Air Force, over the course of the last three to five years, the personnel career field experienced a 40 percent reduction in personnel.

How do you continue to deliver personnel services to the U.S. Air Force with 40 percent fewer people? The answer is called transformation. I went from in line to online. A lot of the transactional work ... as much as possible, we’ve put online and what we can’t do online we have a call center, the Total Force Service Center.

That’s a big deal for the personnel community, not only for the personnelists who do the work, but for our customers, our airmen and our commanders.

Another big deal on our mind constantly is the civilian hiring process. AFPC is responsible for

hiring all civilians for the U.S. Air Force. And we're transforming the way we do that as well.

We have a goal of hiring a civilian in 80 days, of filling a position in 80 days. We've had some issues in the past of how long it takes us for hire a civilian ... but the goal is 80 days. I'm committed to that. My folks are committed to that.

Q. What would you tell airmen about AFPC?

Before I came to AFPC, I wouldn't say I understood what AFPC did. Frankly, AFPC may have been a place to be avoided. As a lieutenant, you don't always get what you hope for in assignments. I'd like to convey a message to all airmen that AFPC is here for you.

We touch every airman, civilian, retiree. We touch their lives over and over again through their careers. I want them to have confidence that AFPC is here to take care of them.

I want airmen to have confidence in AFPC. Let us know what you need and we'll do our best to get it for you. Sometimes the answer will be, "No, you can't have that assignment to Hawaii." When I was a lieutenant, I said send me to Hawaii, Florida or California, what do you mean I've got to go to Base X? It turned out to be the best thing in the world for me.

Q. What do you bring to this job?

I do bring a unique perspective to this job, having been the recruiting commander.

In my time as the recruiting commander, they tell me some 70,000-plus airmen were recruited into the U.S. Air Force and some maybe 1,500 officers came in through OTS [Officer Training School] and medical, and I got to preside over going out on this talent search and bringing the best people this nation had to offer into the Air Force.

And now, guess what I get to do? I get to take care of them. I get to make sure we have a responsive personnel system.

Q. What challenges do you foresee? Has force management played a role in how you do business?

Sure it has. You mentioned force management, and that's exactly the right term. Sometimes folks want to say drawdown and that's not inaccurate, but incomplete.

Our motto at AFPC is right person, right place, right time. That means we have to have the right people in the right places that we can assign, and the force being as small as it is.

Just by comparison, when I came into the Air Force in 1981, we had over 600,000 airmen. Today, 332,000 is where we're headed. How do you do that? How do you cut your force in half

from my time and still accomplish missions?

Every single airman we have must be put in the right place with the right skills to generate the maximum effect.

So, the Air Force has to be shaped and sized correctly. 332,000 is a nice number, but that's not the whole story. When you have that 332,000 you have to ... have them in the right career fields ... [and] the right grade structure. ...

Just think about that. We can get to 332,000, but we might have the wrong people in the wrong places. We're trying to balance all those needs while getting the force to the right size because we can only pay for a force of a certain size and, at the same time, getting the right skills and the right experience.

Q. Where are we headed?

The hard part is the crystal ball. Where's the crystal ball that tells you exactly what you'll need 10 years from now?

If you had looked on Sept. 10, 2001, what the Air Force would look like, none of us would have guessed that [explosive ordnance disposal] would be one of our most important career fields, or cyber warriors, or [remotely piloted aircraft] operators, combat controllers, or Security Forces or pararescuemen, or contractors, for crying out loud. But those would be your most important career fields.

What went wrong with our crystal ball on Sept. 10, 2001? It just didn't see some things coming. That's why we have to have these talented, flexible airmen who can do what the nation needs them to do.

We ask them to be capable and able to do more than we have in the past, and that shows you how challenging the environment can be.

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